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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 001139

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SUBJECT: OVER HALF OF JORDAN'S POLITICAL PARTIES DISBAND AS
NEW LAW TAKES EFFECT

REF: A. AMMAN 535
[1](#)B. AMMAN 580
[1](#)C. AMMAN 832
[1](#)D. 07 AMMAN 4885

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Classified By: Ambassador David Hale
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Jordan's new political parties law came into effect on April 15. The law requires parties to re-register with 500 "founding" members, up from the previous requirement of fifty. So far, eleven parties have made the cut, and six are anticipated to join them. Nineteen other pre-existing parties have either dissolved themselves or become legally defunct. A half-hearted challenge to the law has been filed with the courts, but it will likely be unsuccessful. An Islamic Action Front-sponsored petition to annul or delay the law's implementation was buried in parliament. Only one new party has so far resulted from the law - Parliament Speaker Abdulhadi Al-Majali's National Democratic Trend. All of the other parties that made the cut (including the IAF) simply re-adjusted their membership rolls. Although there had been some previous criticism of the law as anti-democratic, none of our contacts lament the demise of the irrelevant, boutique-sized parties which disbanded. Now that the issue of registration is dealt with, the parties will start to demand the public financing promised by the law. The system of political party registration may have changed, but Jordan's political culture has not. End Summary.

New Political Parties Law Comes Into Force

[1](#)2. (U) On April 15, the political parties law passed by the Jordanian parliament in April 2007 came into effect. As forecast in Ref A, the majority of Jordan's tiny, irrelevant political parties was unable to reach the higher bar set by the new law. Unable to gather the retroactive 500 "founding" members required by the statute, most of Jordan's political parties simply dissolved themselves. There were thirty-six parties in the old regime. Now there are eleven, with six more set to join that number once their reviews are completed by the Ministry of Interior.

[1](#)3. (U) Parties which have completed the necessary paperwork and re-registered with the Ministry of Interior include the Popular Unity Party, the Du'a Party, the Jordanian National Party, the Hashd Party, the Islamic Center Party, the Al-Hayah Party, the Islamic Action Front, the National Democratic Trend, the Democratic People's Party, the Al-Resalah Party, and the Jordanian United Front Party. Note: While the specifics vary, most of these parties represent moderate reformist elements among Jordan's political elite. The exception is the Islamic Action Front.

End Note. Six parties (the Socialist Ba'ath Party, the Advancement Party, the Communist Party, the Welfare Party, the Freedom Party, the Equality Party) have filed their paperwork with the Ministry of Interior, but have not yet been officially certified as having met the requirements of the law.

Challenges to the Law

¶4. (C) Complaints from political parties which were forced to shut their doors mostly center on the alleged unconstitutionality of the statute. Despite this, only four parties (the Arab Lands Party, the Citizen Rights Movement, the Rights Party, and the Arab Supporters Party) joined in a lawsuit challenging the legality of the new rules. Even if the lawsuit is successful, the lack of a constitutional court in Jordan will make it nearly impossible for the parties to obtain the necessary summary ruling that would strike down the entire law (Ref B). Leaders of Jordan's other dissolved parties have been vocal in their calls for judicial action, but the fact that they have not actually filed a case shows that they realize the futility of the legal route in this instance.

¶5. (C) Thirty MPs (including six IAF representatives) petitioned for a last-minute reversal of the political party rules - a populist gesture on the part of Islamists (Ref C). In the end, that petition was buried (intentionally or otherwise) in parliament's busy end-of-session calendar. The parliament adjourned on April 1 without any debate or action on the petition, which some in the community of political parties saw as the last possible way to save their organizations. There are rumors that the King will call parliament back into an extraordinary session in June, but no one anticipates that it will consider any changes to the political parties law in any such session. IAF spokesman

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Rheil Gharaibeh issued a statement on April 14 noting that the party "tried its best to change the law during the past year, but failed."

The Chosen Few

¶6. (C) The idea, according to the Minister of Political Development and other government contacts, was that the new law would jostle Jordan's political makeup, strengthening political life by consolidating or eliminating weak and irrelevant parties (many of which are simply platforms for individual self-promotion) and perhaps leading to the creation of brand new, more broadly representative political parties. Yet so far, only one new party has emerged as part of the process. That party, the National Democratic Trend (aka the National Democratic Movement, aka the National Democratic Front), is the brainchild of Abdulhadi Al-Majali, the Speaker of Parliament. As previously reported in Refs A and D, this party could potentially fill the yawning gap in Jordanian politics - that of a moderate, pro-government, nationalist party. However, Majali's previous efforts to create such a party were stillborn, and the public rollout which Majali's supporters predicted has yet to materialize. Even so, one party (the Dawn Party) decided to join the National Democratic Trend rather than dissolve itself.

¶7. (SBU) One group that ended up heeding the government's call for party mergers was the communists. On April 10, Jordan's two communist parties (the Jordan Communist Party and the Jordanian Communist Workers Party) announced that they were joining forces. The new party will be called the Jordanian Communist Party. As reported by daily newspaper Al-Arab Al-Yawm, the leaders of the two parties denied that the new law was the primary cause of the merger, declared that the merger was coordinated with other communist parties in the region, and called it "the outcome of lengthy

dialogues over the past several years." The unified Jordanian Communist Party will maintain its membership in the Higher Coordination Committee of Opposition Parties, the group of political parties led by the Islamic Action Front which frequently proclaims anti-government and anti-American stances.

¶18. (C) For its part, the Islamic Action Front (the political wing of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood) submitted its paperwork to the Ministry of Interior on April 12. Either as a show of force or in anticipation of potential government efforts to undermine it, the IAF listed 700 "founding" members - 200 more than the requirement. Note: Contacts in other parties told us that they had done the same, realizing that their registrations could be in jeopardy if they submitted the bare minimum, only to find that the Ministry of Interior found a small number of their founders "undesirable." End Note. According to press reports, the IAF's petition was approved by the Interior Ministry on April ¶14. Regardless, upon obtaining official approval, IAF secretary-general Zaki Bani-Irshaid issued a predictable

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condemnation of the law, saying that it "obstructs political dynamism, restricts public freedoms that were guaranteed by the constitution, contradicts democracy, consolidates one-sided political vision, affirms the superficial nature of public action, and further marginalizes political parties."

Left Behind

¶19. (C) Despite the public fury of parties who were negatively impacted by the law, most Jordanians have little sympathy for those who were unable to make the cut. "If you can't win a seat in parliament, then you're not a party," says political commentator Jemal Refa'i, himself the former head of a small political party. "In order to truly advance public life in Jordan, the parties have to join forces. We've tried so many times," he laments. Refa'i and other contacts criticize the government for not doing enough to help political parties get a foothold in Jordanian society, but are far more critical of the parties themselves, which have failed to produce anything close to grassroots organizations. Judging by the fact that only one new party was created as a result of the process, contacts expect that Jordan's political system will essentially continue as it did in the past, with parties that have little reach or influence into the policy arena.

All Sticks, No Carrots

¶10. (C) The new political parties law was sold as a tradeoff - the government would require a larger organizational commitment from the parties in return for public financing.

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The parties have now fulfilled their end of the bargain, but the government has yet to provide the details of how and when its monetary obligations will be met. No money has been allotted to date for distribution to political parties, and the promised mechanism for distribution is still on the drawing board. The issue of public financing has not made it into the press so far, but it is only a matter of time now that the registration process is complete.

Comment

¶11. (C) It will take more than a new law to make political parties relevant in Jordan. Some of the structural inadequacies of the old system have been corrected, yet the issue of Jordan's political culture remains. A study by the Jordan Center for Social Research from 2007 showed that 98.3 percent of Jordanians have never belonged to a political

party. Tribal loyalties will continue to dominate the choices of Jordan's voters until those ties are superseded by political formations that have a measurable impact on the lives of ordinary people. So far, the Islamic Action Front and Muslim Brotherhood associated charities are the only organizations that have been even remotely successful in offering Jordanians a workable political alternative - and even they are starting to use tribal ties as a crutch. Reforming the legal structure for political parties in Jordan was the easy part. Changing the political culture to match it will be far more difficult.

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